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## FRAGMENTS OF A STATEMENT OF IDEALISM.

This article is a sequel to one called "The Idealist and the Intuitionist," published in the January number of this JOURNAL. In that article, for particular reasons, I suggested that the chief terms of idealist ethics might sometimes be defined as follows: Any object is *good* for a being when it fulfils a need of his, or if actual would fulfil it. I *approve* of an object when I recognize that it would fulfil my need. "This *ought* to be" means "this is what is wanted." *Self-realization* means the greatest possible fulfilment of a being's needs. "Need" was used in the widest and most popular sense; idealism undeniably has much to say about the nature of our needs and of their objects, but for my purpose I suggested that this should be left for a positive element in the doctrine of idealism—a clause in its creed—and need not be taken into the definitions of its terms.

I believe the chief doctrines of ordinary idealist ethics *can* be expressed by this method, though it is certainly not in every way the most suitable. In this article I wish to illustrate it by writing in a desultory way about the doctrines, in that language and from that point of view.

For a prologue, let us examine the analogy on which idealism generally insists between the volitional and the cognitive process. Approaching the subject from our given direction, with the given emphasis on the way in which we work out the satisfaction of our needs, we shall find much help in that analogy.

According to modern psychology, I begin on the cognitive side with a single vague presentation continuum, a blur of the most elementary judgment or belief. Gradually differentiation and detail appear, and the features of the nebula outline and define themselves. I pass along the scale of vagueness from the first, "Something-or-other is," to "This is the case here" and "That is so there," and "A is north of B," and "All men are mortal." The "notion" is gradually transformed into the concept. And throughout I am governed by the idea, more or

less implicit, of *consistency*. I criticise; I mould my beliefs till they fit in with one another. Incompatible ideas are not merely thrown aside; each is given its fair chance of claiming respect, and one or the other, or an element in both, is likely to succeed. A very obstinate and constant perception probably some day gets the sphere of science modified to suit it. But every now and then an element is simply set aside and given up. It cannot possibly fit in with the rest; our ordered system of belief will admit most of what we tend to believe, but not this. "We cannot allow this," we say; "we must sacrifice it to the rest; it must have been a mistake."

I begin on the conative side with my nature's whole vague mass of craving, as yet undeveloped and undistinguished. Before I can give a name to any object of desire there is the mere "I *want* —." Then this continuum also grows and defines itself and differentiates, and here also through the differentiation the mere psychological unity of mass is turned into the logical unity of system. I add detail; in both spheres one point suggests another. I come, for instance, to desire one thing as means to another, just as I believe one thing as a deduction from another. And just as independent evidence will attest a deduction or a necessary promise, so independent affection springs up for a result of a means. "A pet plan" is no longer merely a plan for the sake of an end.

And here also I order and criticise. I try to mould my world to fit me, to get what is most comfortable on the whole. Bit by bit I try to work out that kind of life which is most satisfactory. Just as the creed worked out by the ordinary man—what he allows himself "really" to believe—covers most of what he has tended to believe, so the practical life worked out will normally give fulfilment to most of his nature. Heredity and bringing-up and common life and common human qualities are as powerful on the one side as on the other.

And yet here also there is sacrifice. One aim must be subordinated to another; one satisfaction given up for the sake of satisfaction on the whole. In both realms we must aim at what works *best*. (On neither side, of course, do we think often of this in the abstract: of self-realization as such, or the

abstract "fit" of beliefs. We think of the things that concern us, and work at them until they look better.) My present needs, and my present perceptions and reasonings, are partly discordant amongst themselves. Therefore, just as my present self cannot be perfectly realized, so neither can my world of belief be made without fault; "the realization of the object" cannot yet be perfect. On the other hand, mere asceticism and narrow-mindedness are one; for that is not a good system of science or philosophy which flings aside a hundred old beliefs as "false," ignoring the part of them which could still be fitted on and could improve the whole.

The process on both sides must be largely a matter of instinct and tact. We have a good accumulation of general knowledge as to methods which generally answer, but we cannot formulate rules to cover details of special cases. Even accident and empiricism constantly come in. We construct a theory to account for a few little facts, and suddenly find it accounting for the puzzles of our whole life. We get a thing almost by chance, and only then discover how much and for how many reasons we wanted it.

The analogy may be pushed further in two rather helpful ways.

In the first place, we are left in both cases with our descriptions somewhat incompletely explained. Except in the simplest cases, we cannot properly explain or explicitly justify our statement that one state or event fulfils our needs *more* than another. Our intuition is still at the level below and not above that of understanding and discursive thought. Our instinct is to speak in terms of unit of need and unit of fulfilment, to find some measure of importance and some expression for relations, to show what value comes from the different kinds of wholes in which parts are combined. But sheer ignorance prevents us from doing it. Are we not in exactly the same position with regard to "a more satisfactory system" in science or philosophy or the details of daily life? We cannot say what we mean by claiming that the other theory left "more" facts unaccounted for, or more important facts. We cannot interpret the giving "due" weight to every piece of evidence. We can only say

obstinately, "This is better. . . It is more convincing, for it convinces more."

And secondly, there is a further step to be taken in both realms.

Our inadmissible judgments and needs are by no means always the important things that I may have made them sound. A dozen times in a month, perhaps, we bring out a sum to the wrong answer, or we think we see a friend who is really elsewhere, or think we hear a cup break which is afterwards found whole; and when confuted we simply say "it must have been a mistake," and never think of it again. Yet in these sacrificed fragments there still lurks a certain minute danger to the system of our beliefs. We might be made uncomfortable by somebody's persistently referring to the inexplicability of the impressions described; we might be bullied thus into doubting the best established system; and there would then be a distinctly pleasurable sense of increased safety in discovering a nearly invisible mend in the cup, or in learning that the friend in question happened to have acquired the power of occupying two places at the same time.

Therefore we must notice the one way in which the danger is prevented and the obstacle entirely removed—left no longer at the critic's disposal. This one way is the process of *accounting for our mistakes*. A dozen times in a day we make mistakes and explain them, and then have no slightest inclination to believe the thing any more. We are satisfied when we see the broken plate which accounts for the noise, or get a nearer view of the stranger whom in the distance we took for our friend.

The analogy in the conative sphere is that of the *extinction* of a need. All needs are not fixed and permanent things, any more than all beliefs. Not only may I sacrifice a desired object, but I may cease to want it at all.

Complete truth would account for all conflicting notions, and I suppose a perfectly realized self would have all its desires extinguished whose satisfaction could not be allowed. In one sense there would be "self-realization" in any state which fulfilled this condition, but of course this is not the full sense of

the self-realization at which we aim. We try primarily to get, not absence of dissatisfaction, but as much satisfaction as possible.<sup>1</sup>

After these preliminaries, I will go on to state and discuss in my own language what I take to be a chief part of the doctrine of idealist ethics.

To put it very shortly to begin with: Idealists conceive a certain condition or process of life in the world, to which every person is thought of as contributing. The perfect condition, they say, they cannot describe, but they know its direction; or, as we may put it equally well, they know pretty well the form that the process should take at this point, though not the exact completion of it; and they describe it in some detail. The process thus described, they say, satisfies the needs of the whole world better than any other could do. And in his special share in this one process—in the duties of his station thus conceived—lies the self-realization of every person in the world.

Popular ways of thinking conform to a great extent with a rough belief in this doctrine, and the cognitive analogy is again interesting. We assume in daily life that normal human beings all want much the same thing, just as we assume that they all believe much the same thing. The authority of others weighs greatly with regard to what is satisfying, just as it weighs greatly with regard to what is true. A person is called feeble-minded when he shares his fundamental perceptions with us, but has not the strength to hold them all together in a well-organized system of thought. He is "morally feeble" when he wants the same kind of life as we, but has not the energy to get it. On the other hand, if a man's world of thought clashes irreconcilably with our own, we set him aside and call him a lunatic. And if a man seems to have wants which are really and fundamentally different from ours, we call him a lunatic too, and send him to Broadmoor. Where lunacy is absent, needs like ours are assumed, and therefore reasonable action is

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice that we do not always try to distinguish a desire which is not to be fulfilled. *E. g.*, when we have decided to do without the presence of a friend, our loyalty is dissatisfied if we cease to miss him.

supposed the same for all. "Don't be *silly*" is what we say to a naughty child, and a wicked man is one who has "played the fool."

Such rough belief in the doctrine of the common good is fairly universal, but an exact belief is much harder, and it may even be questioned by some whether we really need it. Are we bound to say, for instance, that in all possible circumstances, and in every stage of his education or of his degradation, a man would find the greatest fulfilment of his needs in the action which contributed to that state which we conveniently call "the good of the whole?" would find it there even though the action involved his annihilation the moment after? (For individual immortality is not usually assumed.)

Well, T. H. Green said that there would be no discrepancy between the individual's good and the good of the whole, and he also said that the characteristic of good was to satisfy desire. But he never actually defined good as satisfaction, or said that our greatest good satisfied us most. So that, although he would have to say that the individual would always find his greatest good in promoting the good of the whole, he is not committed to saying that he would always find in that way the greatest fulfilment of his needs. Is it fair for me to get this second statement by inserting my own definition of "good," and to propose that the result be still called idealism?

At any rate, I will go on to examine what the adoption of the doctrine actually involves. To what do we commit ourselves if we assert that the paths of private and public good, in any sense of good, are invariably the same?

Something can be done by appealing to "sanctions," to motives of purely "selfish" interest; it is broadly true that things will be made uncomfortable for us if we misbehave badly. But these motives are certainly not sufficient to secure exact coincidence, and idealism has laid very little stress on them even so far as they go. If the proposed doctrine were only one of coincidence by means of these, it would have no right at all to a place.

Much more can be done by pointing out how large a proportion of men's desires is for objects which are public as well as

private goods. We do actually wish for knowledge and beauty for their own sakes, and we wish for the welfare of our family and friends, and for peace and order and kindness apart from the benefit they bring to our "private selves," and we desire to do what we can to promote all this. We desire these concrete objects, which, according to the idealist, are parts of that best life of the world which he describes. Our "selfish" goods no doubt are also part, but an indefinitely smaller part.<sup>2</sup>

Yet even so we cannot be certain that discrepancy will *never* occur. We need more than we have yet got.

And more can be found. It is evident that in many men at any rate, there is a desire more fundamental than all these endeavors for concrete things, in the sense that if necessary these would be sacrificed to it. That is the desire for the good of the whole *as such*. By such a desire many men will test the propriety of satisfying all the others, and any concrete object would be given up on proof that in the case in question it was not for the good of the whole.

Now if idealism were fanciful enough to claim that this was the *only* desire in the normal man, it would leave us without any special content for the good life (in any sense of good), for every particular object would be indifferent to everybody. But if we claimed that it was so present and fundamental in every man that he desired nothing *in comparison* with it, that he would always pursue his own self-realization in case of conflict by sacrificing other things for its sake, then we should have an infallible method for securing coincidence between private and public good.

We cannot claim a universal conscious desire of the sort, but we might claim a universal need, and I believe that idealism must do so. It is not the only thing that the typical idealist maintains, for he has always stood for the greater weight—the greater fundamentalness and importance in human nature—of

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<sup>2</sup> Suppose even a commonplace man, believing himself as selfish as he believes others, to be convinced that he is to die on August 6th and the world to end on August 7th. Apart from all thoughts of his own immortality, he will be much more excited about the second date. I owe this observation to a friend.



what we call the "higher" wants in the whole scale, in comparison with the lower. But without the final fundamentalness of this highest need we should have no *security* for the absolute coincidence we seek. The doctrine cannot be shortly or nearly stated. "When we come near to feeling our needs as they actually are, so that our conscious desires correspond to them, we desire all such things as are good, and amongst these we desire especially such as are honorable and pure and lovely and of good report, and therefore these will make up the greater part of that life which is the good of the whole. But beyond all these we desire that abstract good, and, for the man who knows what he really wants, every special object of pursuit is tested by its relation to this."

Idealism, then, is the expression of a supreme faith in human nature. What a man *really* wants, it is said, is "to know what is true, to make what is beautiful, to endure pain and fear, to resist the allurements of pleasure, in the interests of some form of human society." And all this he wants only in subordination to his pursuit of the good of the universe, though not only as means to this end.

Notice that we are not claiming that every man will find his greatest pleasure in promoting the good of the whole. I had rather avoid even the word "satisfaction," if that carries a reference to conscious emotion. We mean only that if a man knew the world and himself, and *felt* himself all through, he would desire this, and its attainment would then give him the greatest possible satisfaction, and he would choose it for the only possible reason, because he wanted it. (When these explanations are gone through, my statements seem to become so like those of ordinary idealism that it is hardly worth while to make them afresh.) And since it is only this greater knowledge and realization that is required for him to make that choice, we say that his *needs* are of this nature all along. But we imperfect beings work largely, not by feeling our deepest needs but by remembering them or guessing at them or taking them on trust; it is only in hours of insight that we feel them vividly and clearly. Hence the apparently intellectualist character of much morality. I do a thing not because I want itself but because I approve of

it, *viz.*: know that I really need it. I remember Philip sober, and do what he would wish. A modern Platonist might say that justice was the memory of love.

In connection with this self-realization of individuals through a common good, we ought to bring the subject into relation with what idealists have said about the "General Will."

"The General Will," says Dr. Bosanquet,<sup>3</sup> "is the will of the whole society 'as such,' or the wills of all individuals 'in so far as' they aim at the common good. It is expressed in law, 'in so far as' law is what it ought to be; and sovereignty 'as such,' *i. e.* when truly itself because rightly acting for the common interest, is the exercise of the General Will."

I think that Dr. Bosanquet's whole treatment of the subject implies that the "common good" aimed at must be primarily the common good "as such," the *abstract* good of the whole which we spoke of before. It is not enough that an object sought, *e. g.* a political measure, should just *happen* to be for the good of the whole. A man who promotes this measure only for the sake of his private interests has not the General Will acting in him. When this is present all concrete objects of desire will be sought with the qualification (of course not often explicit or fully conscious) "in so far as they do tend to the good of the whole." We need not say that the General Will is *merely* the will for the abstract common good; it can include the will for all concrete objects so far as subordinated to this. When a man acts in this spirit, we may conveniently say that the General Will is acting in him; and this even though he may err greatly in his idea of the concrete embodiments of the common good.

By far the most serious kind of error will occur in the case of the General Will of a limited group, whose members have not recognized that the group itself can only find its true good in subordinating itself to the world which includes it. A man may be willing to annihilate his private self in the service of his family or his church or his nation, but not perceive that these can truly prosper only by annihilating themselves, if necessary,

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<sup>3</sup> "The Philosophical Theory of the State," page 107.

in the service of the universe. For instance, I vaguely remember meeting in an old magazine with an article called "Hands off Trinity," in which the author contended that the duty of some commission or committee was simply to act for the good of Trinity College, Dublin, as opposed to acting for the good of education or of Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

Of course language creates a difficulty here. The annihilation spoken of, according to idealism, may be the good of every individual in the group, and be the good even for them as a group; be what they were all born for. But the title of "Trinity College," or of "England," or of "the North Western Railway Company," seems given to the group in a certain *aspect*, and the good of the world may involve that aspect ceasing to exist. It seems hard to say that this is still the good of the college or the country or the company. But we must insist that it is the good of the group of human beings which bears the name.

I take it that it is this kind of mistake to which Dr. Bosanquet refers on page 327 of "The Philosophical Theory of the State." "The nearest approach which we can imagine to public immorality would be when the organs which act for the State, as such, exhibit in their publication, on its behalf, a narrow, selfish, or brutal conception of the interest of the State as a whole, in which, so far as can be judged, public opinion at the time agrees (*e. g.*, if, with the knowledge of Parliament, and without a protest from it, a price were offered for the killing of a hostile statesman or general). In such a case the State, as such, may really be said to be acting immorally, *i. e.*, in contravention of its main duty to sustain the conditions of as much good life as possible. This case must be distinguished, if I am right, from the case in which the individuals acting as the public authority, are corrupted in their own private interests not shared with the public. For then the case would rather be that the State, the organ of the public good, had not been given a chance to speak, but had simply been defrauded by those who spoke in its name."

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<sup>4</sup> My remembrance is exceedingly vague, and if I do anybody injustice, I apologize.

We must, however, distinguish two further possibilities in the given case of the State's immoral action. A supporter, if questioned, might say that it was for the good of the whole world that each country should receive unqualified service from its members, including the authorized assassination of hostile statesmen. This would presumably be a mistake, but a much deeper mistake would appear if the supporter of the action maintained that a country for its own good need look to itself only, and did not necessarily find that good in the service of the world. Yet even here, if the patriot seeks his country's good as such, the General Will of that country is acting in him, though the mind which guides it errs grievously.

To return to the general idealist doctrine. We may state it now in new terms by saying that the General Will of the universe is fundamental in every man, so that his self-realization can only be found in endeavoring to carry it out. And his will for his own greatest good, and the general wills of every group of human beings that we like to pick out, will, if enlightened, seek mutually consistent and largely coincident objects; and all these wills will exercise themselves in that life of the universe which is its greatest good, since all will have in them the qualification, "Nothing is to be sought which conflicts with the good of the whole."

Good is what we want; we want mostly the things that the whole world wants in common; and what we want most of all is the service of the world. For some moralists the fulness of virtue lies in whole-hearted living according to a law, and the weakened form is resolute obedience. For idealism, from our point of view, the fulness of virtue would reside in a being who was in love with the universe, and the weakened form of it is loyalty.

Finally, how is this doctrine to be proved?

Evidently there is no empirical way; it must stand or fall along with a system of metaphysics. Of course we really have exactly the same sort of thing to establish in the cognitive sphere, for only metaphysics justifies us in assuming that all rational beings will think in terms of causation, and admit that  $2+3=5$ . Science does not begin by proving the necessity of

its categories or justifying the "evidence" of the senses. It says, "You think at bottom on the same methods as we, and see the same when you look in the same direction. Here are the results of such methods and such looking." So in morals, "You really want the same sort of thing as we want; here are institutions and histories showing you how it works out." Science and morals turn into philosophy when they begin examining the categories themselves. And in both realms we may begin not only to examine but to question; the intellectual skeptic asks, "Why should I think in terms of causation?" the ethical skeptic, "Why should I want to be moral?" Historical answers on both sides have appealed to "association," but the answer of idealism has to go deeper than that.

Attempts have been made to do without metaphysics. For instance, it is sometimes said that the kind of good we seek is the only one which can possibly be desired because the only "coherent ideal;" or again, there is a very curious little logical and psychological proof, "The Religious Aspect of Philosophy" (pages 132-139), which has disappeared in Professor Royce's later works. I cannot think that any of these succeed. The universality of the needs that are in question can only be proved by reference in some form or other to "the divine principle within us." Ethical manuals, however, when they profess to give a metaphysical justification, often curtail it so much that it is of practically no use to the beginner. Take, for instance, Mr. D'Arcy's "Short Study of Ethics," page 102: "If all persons form a true community, then the end of one must be the end of each and of the whole. All persons are mutually exclusive . . . yet are they one in God. Hence the good for the whole is the good for every separate member. The *True Good* for every man is a *Common Good* and an *Absolute Good*." This is evidently insufficient for a proof with my sense of "good," though Mr. D'Arcy could indeed hardly have been required to provide for that sense. What is needed for my purpose is, to put it with extreme crudeness and popularness, a statement of some such doctrine as the following: We are all incarnations of God in such wise that we share with one another most or all of the wants which mark out the

life He wills, and that in particular we have fundamental in us God's aim after the *greatest* fulfilment of His needs. So our self-realization can only be involved in His, for each of us has God's qualification at the bottom of him—"seek this and that, but not further than they tend to my good," to the greatest good of the whole, which whole God is. As a man's "true" thoughts are what God thinks, so his "true" satisfaction is what satisfies God.

I need hardly say that I do not propose seriously to attribute ordinary desire and temporal conation to the Absolute. Yet such a popular statement as the above, with due emphasis on its popular nature, would, I believe, in a manual of ethics do more good than harm.

I have tried to state some fragments of idealist ethics consistently in terms reached by adopting a special point of view. It is not a very easy task; because the results sound heretical every now and then, and yet, when explanations enough are supplied, they seem to become quite indistinguishable from clumsy expressions of the ordinary versions of the doctrine. I am not sure that it is a good point of view at all for the philosopher; there are too many obscurities behind the popular terms. For instance, I have never defined "need," only described it as that which underlies desire; and then there are all the exceedingly difficult questions as to how far a man can be said to have a need when at present he is incapable of feeling the corresponding desire, and what "greatest fulfilment of needs" can mean when quantitative measurement is out of the question. So that I do not think philosophy is likely to profit much by what I have suggested. On the other hand, this seems to me a possible way for the beginner to approach idealist ethics. It is the way in which I got there myself—if what I have reached is indeed, as I think it is, idealism. It has the advantage for a novice of seeming very clear to him at the beginning, and revealing its obscurities by natural degrees as his metaphysical insight grows. But if it is not to be adopted, I think idealist teachers ought to consider very carefully some other way in which the doctrines may be explained in their manuals, or else postpone to the

post-graduate stage all courses of moral philosophy. For at present I believe that the ethical student who has not studied metaphysics, and especially one who wishes to distinguish between idealism and modern intuitionism, simply does not know what idealist ethics means.

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### THE ETHICS OF GAMBLING.

The extent of gambling at the present time, and the great and insidious evils which result from it, make the discussion of the subject of interest, not merely to the theoretical moralist, but also to everyone who desires to preserve the purity of national and social life. Of the extent of betting and gambling in England, B. Seeböhm Rowntree says, "the practice has spread so widely among all classes of the community that those who know the facts name gambling and drinking as national evils of almost equal magnitude."<sup>1</sup> There is abundant evidence that gambling is almost if not equally as prevalent in the United States. One has only to think of the organization which is dependent on horse-race gambling: the army of bookmakers, and the space given in the newspapers to tips on the races; of the bucket shops and their attendant consequences of ruin and crime; and of the more respectable forms of gambling with raffles, lotteries and social games of cards, to realize that the subject has direct practical significance. The ethical principles underlying gambling and their application to activities of which gambling forms a part deserve careful consideration.

In this discussion, then, the attempt will be made, first, to define gambling and to discover its ethical implications; and second, to apply the principles already discovered to some

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<sup>1</sup> B. Seeböhm Rowntree, "Betting and Gambling: a National Evil." The Macmillan Company, London, 1905, p. 7.